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RECORDS
OF
GHOSTLY
SHIRES

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BALLADS OF GHOSTLY SHIRES

BALLADS OF GHOSTLY SHIRES

FOLK LORE VERSES

BY

George Bartram

AUTHOR OF

"The People of Clopton,"

"The Whiteheaded Boy," &c.

London

Greening & Co., Ltd

20 Cecil Court, St. Martin's Lane

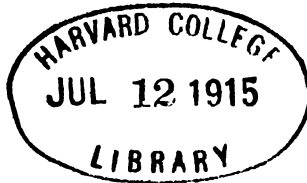
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Ward fund

To
Theodore Watts-Dunton.
That Master of Woodland-and-Gypsy-Lore
who penned
"The Coming of Love,"
These Ballads are respectfully Dedicated.



CONTENTS

	PAGE
PRELUDE, - - - - -	9
UNDER GLAMOUR, - - - - -	16
THE WARLOCK'S WOOING, - - - - -	23
THE WHITE WITCH OF MAVERICK, - - - - -	29
AT THE CROSS ROADS, - - - - -	36
THE DEADLY SIN OF THE MAVERELS, - - - - -	41
MARIAN BLOODWORTH, - - - - -	72
THE MUGGLETONIAN, - - - - -	86
THE WIDOW, - - - - -	91
THE FAIRY HARPER, - - - - -	94
AFTERLUDE : The Poor Scholar, - - - - -	101
IN MEMORIAM { Renunciation, - - - - -	120
{ Of Him Oversea, - - - - -	123
{ On the Hither Bank, - - - - -	127



BALLADS OF GHOSTLY SHIRES.

PRELUDE.

Hood of fur, and horseman's cloak,
And bludgeon stout of English oak—
What need we more, though the night be dark,
And the drift breast-high in the hollows !—
—Hark !

Two miles east doth Blaydon bell
Midnight-wanting-a-quarter tell.

Wrap thee, brother, nose and chin,
And ware the tangles of the whin :
The cold and stately masquer Night
Doth huddle her in snowy shroud,
And all her starry spangles bright
She muffles deep in riftless cloud.

Thou in rear, and I ahead—
And I could deem the world were dead,
Except two hooded shapes of Ill,
New manumitted, but fated still
To droop and wander to and fro
’Twixt lowering sky and drifted snow.

Winterbound lies Dawder Brook—
The great oak squats by Gallows Nook,
A Titan judge, with tumbled snow
And fleecy rime for lordly wig :
That break in the pallid drift below
Of old was called “The Swooning Brig.”

For here the towering gallows stood,
And there, from Lower Ridsdale Wood,
The hideous wain to the common clomb—
Then would the shivering thralls of doom
Sink aghast, with doleful cry,
To view that spectre in the sky.

March, we have not far to go,
For yonder eye of bloody red
That wavering gleams ’twixt cloud and snow
Spells pike and toll-house straight ahead,—

This level streak so clear and thin
Is the footpath winding through the whin.

Darker now, and the eye of blood
Is shrouded deep by Risedale Wood—
Just here we lean to the left awhile—
Now up the bank, and over the stile,
And, hark, our feet ring ironshod
On the granite spine of the Great North Road.

Couch—this drift by the storm was thrown
Above the crest of the Druid's Stone—
Try the bottle—'twas filled of old
From Funchal's lakes of tawny gold—
He wore no hood or horseman's cape
Who corked this essence of the grape.

Whence and how did I furnish me
Of gallows-lore and gramarye ?
From musty volumes bordered-red
In the panelled room at Hamberhead—
Through legends spun of a winter night
By elders crowned with gracious white.

Naked tales of lust and crime,

And vengeance rude of olden time,
In curt and simple Saxon penned—
The cunning scribe to each tale-end
Had bound a moral drab and dry,
To fit his tale for the monkish eye.

And ye, brave wizards white of poll,
Who made me fellow of your guild,
And Youth's curled pate with glamour filled
That tarries yet round Manhood's soul,
Rough-rinded was your rustic lore,
Yet sweet withal from shell to core.

Its stalk was Love by Passion slain,
Its leaf was Man's Abuse of Power,
Its bud was hued of Woman's Pain,
Her' red Disaster was its flower,
And purple did its fruitage swell
With Vengeance grim and terrible.

And ever, when the Doom was due,
The Night's black hood was backward thrown,
And there, as witness weird and wan,
The moon lay moored in spectral blue,
And the void would quiver with levin pale,

And thunder rife in the howling gale

So ever thus was the scene continued
With peering sky and wild howl
While pallid moonlight and levin-glow
Did sleep and dance in dark lanes : now
And o'er the family-worshipping tomb
Oh, bitter, bitter the wild words said

Gloom, and Gloom, and Love and We
Of sylvan Shirelands long ago
Oft your spells were o'er me sung
In dreams of night, and I shuddered on—
Yet many a time as I wakeful lay,
And e'en at noon of a summer's day,

But now, ere woken by the Spell
Must toll afar the midnight bell :
So ever doth mine art require
Or ghostly moon, or levin bright
When thunder battles with the gale
Or, when dead blackness rises the night,
A doleful bell in a distant spire
And shrouding snow on hill and dale

clock strikes twelve.)

* * * * *

Stir thee, stir thee, the frost is fell,
And he that dozes, head on knee,
Ere long shall slumber but too well,
So rouse thee, brother, and answer me—
Hath aught uncanny by us gone,
Betwixt the strokes of twelve and one?

Go to, the flask was by thy beard,
If thou hast nothing seen or heard
Save one tall shadow passing near,
Save one deep whisper in the air,
For spectres legion, o'er the snow,
Wailing ever, did come and go.

Now, mark me well, they wail and sigh
That men have grown so moleish-blind,
So dull of head and base of mind,
These ghosts of yore may pass them by
With beckoning hand and fond intent,
Unheeded still and impotent.

So that the goodly ghosts have sworn
To leave this desert sour and grey,
This wilderness of facts forlorn,

To its own gods of straw and clay,
And even now, with clamorous wail,
Are drifting out beyond the pale.

Hey, good brother ! Didst hear me speak ?
There falls a snowflake on thy cheek—
Yet another, as light as foam—
Brother, brother, 'tis hey for home !
Hey for the peat-fire broad and red
That glows and mutters at Hamberhead !

Oh, but when I list to tell
The ghostly tales I love so well,
The ripened glow of a ruddy fire
Comes nearest to my soul's desire—
A red peat-fire in a panelled room,
And a tiny rift in the curtains warm
That prints a star on the outer gloom,
That waves on high an elfin torch,
To light secure to the gabled porch
The wildered quarry of the storm !

UNDER GLAMOUR (1650).

"Shun the Red Gypsy, when he stands at your threshold in the gloaming. Flee him whose hair has fire in its black; he holds power of Glamour, under which whoever falls shall wander till death overtakes him. Yet there be some that hold this estate of madness happier than that of work-day sense, inasmuch as it leads its thralls forever through wondrous groves of Fancy, into which, under pretence of seeking guidance, they delight to lure all who may converse with them."

Chronicles of Hamberhead.

What has come to you, De Lisle, since the night a:
Wharton Nevil's,
When we drank you bliss galore from the beaker
rimmed with gold?
You were ruddier than the flame, you were Prince of
Pranksome Devils,
You were peerless Knight of Song, you were Lord of
Loves untold,
When we crowned you King of Revels, in that raftered
room of old!

Now your cue is all awry, and the nap has fled your
castor,

And you wander down-at-heel, like the Dane-present-
ing mime,

And the mellow voice of yore has a ring of weird
disaster,

As you mutter saws of dole from your stock of ancient
rhyme—

What has happed you, merry Master of the Brawls of
olden time ?

“By your favour, gentle Sir : You should be some
courtly ranger

To the sylvan calling bred, of the trackless wood-
land free—

I am seeker of the path that, by many a lurking
danger,

To the shining wicket leads by the dark funereal
tree :

Can you guide me, goodly stranger, to that lane of
gramarye ?”

Now, the Fiend beshrew the Craft, and a murrain
seize instanter

On the lightly-tripping tongue of the Stranger at the
door—

And a faggot to the loins of the ruddy-bearded canter
That hath turned a man of parts, by a feat of gypsy
lore,
To this wan and aimless ranter of the babblery of
yore!

I must rake him close and deep with the spur of
memories olden—
I have other quest to ply, knightly vagrant of the
grove,
For I seek the brave De Lisle that was lord of Manor
Bolden—
He that held the Peakmen's hearts in the hollow of
his glove—
And the dame with tresses golden, that was partner
of his love !

"They have heaped her breast with clay, but the
soul of Nevil's daughter
Hath the comely semblance ta'en of a fadeless
nenuphar,
And the moon that yesternight in the pool of Drydon
sought her
Viewed the stainless gem afloat, like a golden-
cinctured star

Flung upon the waveless water from the radiant
dome afar !”

And the Lord of Bolden House?—

—“ He hath done with earthly glory—
He hath drunk of philters strange from a chalice
trebly-banned—
He hath read the riddle wrapped in the page of
magic story—
He must wander night and morn in the maze of
Magic planned
As the quester lank and hoary of a Glamour-shrouded
land !”

Oh, I cannot see for tears, and my heart is numb with
sorrow
At the quenching of this lamp that was lodestar of my
soul ;
Here is nought of passing whim—here is Madness
deep and thorough—
I must delve unto its root : Tell me, chattel sworn of
Dole,
If some hint my love may borrow as to whither lies
the goal.

“Down the gorges dark and deep that the topless
mountains sunder—
Through the ghostly cedarn aisles—past the pickets
of the Dead—
By the passage steeped in gloom, and the spangled
caves of Wonder—
'Neath the arch at midnight carved by the viewless
Hand of Dread—
O'er the bridge that spans the thunder—lies the
path I fain would tread !
“There are treasures prized of old on its floor with
mosses paven,
By despairing wanderers flung ere they turned aside
to die—
There are words of bitter dole on its rocky pillars
graven,
And the bodies of its slain, mid the bracken rank
and high,
Unassailed of stoat or raven, in a grisly sequence
lie !
“Ha, it breaks upon my ken ! Wilt be marcher
stout beside me ?”
There is sorcery on thy brow, there is music on thy
tongue—

Lo, I yield me to the spell; I will march as it may
guide me—

Though the path be paved with fire and the air
with dread be hung—

Though the nameless Door be behind me, I will go with
thee along:

We will march with steadfast step, and our hearts of
valour waken,

When the Voice of dreadful doom from the darkness
bids us stay—

We will stare with blanched eye on the corpses in the
bracken—

We will bave a gleaming blade when the Hand is
raised to slay—

We will press with front unshaken, when the Terror
bars the way:

.

They have shunned the naked steel, we have
scattered wide their picket—

There is light athwart the track—see, the Gate is
close at hand!

In a struggle brief and stern we have broken from
the thicket

To a flood of roseate sheen, by an arch of cypress
spanned—

We have forced the golden wicket—we are lords of
Glamour-land !

THE WARLOCK'S WOOING (1650).

*"There be of warlocks that, in semblance of spaniels
and lovebirds, will creep into favour of maidens."*

Chronicles of Hamberhead.

As down the bank of Maver Burn
The fairy couriers held their way,
They found a sleeper mid the fern—
An infant on her bosom lay—
The pigmy thieves her arms untwined,
And left an elfin babe behind.

To inmost core of Charnwood grove
That errant crew my body bore—
In burrow warm a nest they wove,
And fed me of their sweetest store,
While vernal breeze and thrilling glee
Of throstle made me lullaby.

Five years I rambled, unafraid,
And stirless quite of speech and soul,
To forage in the nutty glade,
And eke the berried woodland toll,

Till, smiling at mine elvish grief,
The rangers bore me to their chief.

The tallest prowler of the wood
And keenest stalker of the fen
Did lay aside his stubborn mood
To teach me craft of broken men—
The trick of nightly ambuscade,
And secrets of the sylvan trade.

Secure I dwelt the rogues among,
And, by the grace of flesh and mead,
A galliard grew of sinew strong,
Yet virginal in thought and deed ;
Then, wearied of the ways of men,
I stole to Solitude again.

In Peakland dale I found a nook
Wherein I tenderly might cull
The secret sweet of cliff and brook
And cavern wondrous beautiful,
And there my spirit came to be
As one with air and sky and tree.

'Twas then, in trance of glamour laid,

I sounded wells of Mystery,
That I Magister might be made
In lore of woodland gramarye,
And woke to find, on either hand,
Strange ministers at my command.

Fair faces smiled from every cloud,
Strange kisses dropped from every tree,
Weird figures raised the tufted shroud
That midnight loosened on the lea,
And morning found me listening still
To music from the wooded hill.

And when I trod the pearléd green,
No dewdrop trickled from the bent—
No shadow marred the sky serene
When mousing with the jars I went,
Or winding, with the western breeze,
In spiral maze above the trees.

'Twas thus I scoured the starry night,
And tasted all its honied bliss,
But through the day did most delight
In vagrant metamorphosis,

And o'er the dells my course would hold
In subtle guises manifold.

Until it chanced as, soaring slow,
I played the hawk o'er Marden Lea,
There reached me from a bower below
A strain of languorous melody—
A sweetly-spun-and-chanted rime
Of baffled love in olden time.

I shaped me as the bird of Love,
And sank unto the daisied floor—
I fluttered round the ferny grove
Melodious with that strain of yore,
Until, with many a signal sweet,
The songstress lured me to her feet.

She reached to me a rounded arm—
She leaned to me a radiant head—
She placed me in her bosom warm,
And tempted me with kisses red—
She bore me on her shoulder white
Unto a chamber fair and bright.

Its curtains were of bluest silk,

Its panels were of blackest grain,
Its sheets were white as curdled milk
Beneath their crimson counterpane,
And violet-odour fresh distilled
From eve till dawn that chamber filled.

I lingered there a summer fleet,
The crooning poppet of her bower,
And many a ditty wondrous sweet
She sang to me in idle hour
Of maidens doomed to dole and wrong
By Love that tarried over-long.

I chose a clear and windless night—
The moon was low on *Maver Glen*—
I crept me to her pillow white,
A warlock of the woods again :
I chained her fast in stirless sleep
With spells of magic grim and deep.

I bore her to the dome of blue
That smiled upon the sleeping dale,
Then down and down we circling flew
Through star-spun glamour pure and pale—
I took her to my sylvan cell,
And bound her with a double spell.

I wove my heart around her brain,
And bade its memories begone,
I linked us in an endless chain
Of wizard-wrought Oblivion,
Now nought of bygone or to be
Can come betwixt my love and me!

THE WHITE WITCH OF MAVERICK (1700).

"It is known that men have pursued witches, and been grievously handled by them. A witch loves the blood of a man of courage, and, after she has worked her will with him, will break his neck, as the Devil did with Dr. Faustus."

Chronicles of Hamberhead.

In Maverick town on Marden Plain
There stalks the ruthless Doom of yore—
The shroud is pulled athwart the pane—
The cross is branded on the door—
The cresset paints the tumbled snow,
And hourly clangs the bell of woe
From ivied turret hoar.

A raven crossed the manor-reeve,
And ere the night a shroud was sewn—
The vintner drooped at early eve,
And Curfew heard his dying moan—
The Mayor walked in Marden Dell,
And reeling mid the bracken fell,
Beside the Druid's Stone.

The roystering trio bluff and red,
That wooed the steaming silver bowl,
No more at dawn shall reel to bed,
No more by night the chorus troll ;
The virgin snow a mantle wove
To screen the shapely mound above
Each lusty jobbernowl.

“Who is the witch?” in square and street
A hundred furious voices yell—
A toothless corse, with fettered feet,
Lies bloating in the ruined well,
Yet still the cressets flicker red,
And, from the turret overhead,
Still drones the passing-bell.


The Crier stands the stocks behind,
And stuns the street with brazen clang—
“A purse of gold, to find and bind—
Be’t beldam-witch or warlock-man—
To all, of ‘haviour bad or good!’”
The cry has flown to Maver wood,
Where lies Red Runciman.

Red Runciman is out-of-law—

The county clamours for his head,
And, since the deed of Marden Shaw,
Most bitterly his lot hath sped,
Yet stone his heart, and steel his strength,
Although, a weary winter's length,
He knows not Christian bed.

Red Runciman all darkling lies
In hold of hollow chestnut-tree,
With museful knots above his eyes,
And fingers hooked on hairy knee ;
Now, know ye this, that broken men,
Who nightly prowl on Maver Fen,
May curious visions see.

It may have been a fen-born cloud
Afloat upon the waste so white—
It may have been a wandering witch,
Trailing loose her vaporous shroud
Across the glamour ghastly-bright
By the moon unfolded yesternight—
But what has been may be again,
So, hey for a chase on Maver Fen,
When the turret tall of twelve has tolled—
To dart and wheel on blades of steel



For a pardon free and a purse of gold !

.

At the stroke of midnight drear
From the mist-cloud on the mere
Comes a tinkling keen and blythe,
Like the screech of a whetted scythe
On a summer morning clear,
And a shadow dark and dim
Through the fog doth reel and swim—
With that sound is drawing near !

Comes a skater swift and tall
On the track of that fleeing shade—
Every swinging stroke he makes,
Far behind the ice-scurf breaks
From the dint of the spurning blade !

Like a pressed and doubting hare
In and out the quarry heads—
Now she steers athwart the moon—
Now she doubles for the reeds—
Now she points for Maverick town—
Yet nearer the skate-stroke peals,
And closer the skater wheels—
Whoop ! He has run her down !

By a breeze from the westward rolled
Swings the fog to upper air—
From its shimmering underfold
Hangs the pallid moon astare—
Runciman the Red, beware :
It is no dame of mortal mould
That lies upon thy shoulder there :

Faith, 'tis a parlous thing,
When the pallid moon is low,
To a spectral dame to cling,
While the icebound mere below,
To a measure faint and slow,
Like a storm-tost sea doth swing :

From his brow so drawn and white
Drip the sweat-beads silver-bright
On her locks of flaming gold,
But he clasps her with a straining arm,
For, oh, her cheek is ripe and warm,
And her velvet breast hath a nameless charm
That never mortal maid's may hold :

In sooth it is a damsel fair,
That bares beneath the waning moon

A bosom white as is the rose
That in the wood of Maver blows
When days are long in June ;
Her voice is melting music, meet
For the dirge of Love, so smooth and sweet
It rides the brunt of time and tune.

Round and round, ever around,
In a mounting maze they go—
He that views that rigadoon
'Neath the wondering stars and moon
Sees a hundred comets whirl—
Sees a dozen moons aglow—
He that hears her laughter low,
At each wide and soaring swirl,
Shall ever after strive in vain
To chase the witchery from his brain.

“ Kiss me no more, your lips are cold,
And, though I curse and writhe amain,
I cannot overcome this held
Upon my bursting heart and brain—
Would'st choke me, witch? Now, Jesu 'fend ! ”

“ Come close, come close, my work must end !

The moon sinks deep in lakes of snow—
Thy bosom beats like a burial-drum,
So thunderous-deep and deadly-slow—
Thou wouldst—thou hast—and all is o'er ! ”

The moon lies drowned, the stars are gone,
All vast and black the gloom sweeps on—
Red Runciman shall roam no more !

.
What ails to-night Dame Runciman ?
Why doth she mute and trembling lie ?
She dreamed but now of an outcast son—
She heard a loud and doleful cry—
She heard a dull and daunting sound,
As though there fell on frozen ground
A huge downheaval from the sky !

The sunrise mounts beyond the mere ;
Lies at the threshold of the door
A ghastly corse, with veins drawn dry,
With twisted neck, and starting eye—
Red Runciman shall roam no more !

AT THE CROSS-ROADS (1750).

"I have heard of the finding of the skeleton of a woman buried as Accurst. It bore marks of impalement, yet the stake was wanting. By it lay the bones of an infant, and a naked sword."

Chronicles of Hamberhead.

Sinner sweet, whom the Law hath thrown
Where the crossways stare at the moon-lit sky,
With the cruel stake in your white breast-bone,
To your priest-banned grave that hath never a
stone

I have crept me secretly.

Yestermorn, in the fenward shire,
There was lightning blue on the flooded lea,
And the seaboard rang with the thunder's ire,
But my limbs were steel, and my blood took fire,
When your doom was told to me.

Oldsters twelve, not otherwise,
With a lawyer sullen and gouty-kneed,
In the great dark hall of the Shire Assize,
To the gallows-king, as a lawful prize,
Had your tender throat decreed.

Dank with sweat was my stallion's mane,
And the foam-flakes fell from his mouth like
snow—

I could see your blood in the driving rain—
I could hear your voice on the reedy plain
With the tempest come and go.

Long I lurked by the copse-hung stile,
Till a hind brought news at birth of day
That the glozer sly who with wanton wile
Did mine uncle's maid to his net beguile,
In the dawn had crept away.

On I rode, with drooping head,
Till the reeling street span around with me,
As they bore you past all cold and dead,
And your pale throat looped with the garter red
That had decked your lovely knee.

Cold and dead, and your bosom white
At its nipple bore yet a rosy stain,
Where your baby's lips had ringed it tight,
Ere his mother's hand, in her grim despoite,
Had the fruit of Passion slain.

Here and there did the gazers fly
As I spurred my steed to the swollen ford,
Where a horseman tarried, with blenchful eye—
There were pistols twain at his holstered thigh,
And I had but a sword.

Straight and swift at his heart I rode,
And his neck hung low o'er the driven steel,
As I thrust him down in the ravening flood,
Where the eddies whirled, as they drank his blood,
Like dancers in a reel.

Cousin mine, ere you went astray
In the fields of Guilt with that dastard cold,
Was there never a one a word could say
Of a lover warm, and a sunlit day,
In Marston Fen of old ?

Sweetheart mine, though the moon is high,
Ne'er a kiss of ours shall the cold witch see,
For a gale of Fenland is speeding by,
And tho' clouds hunt close in the fading sky—
Never a star this tryst may spy
Betwixt the Dead and me !

.


Ah, my hands are hands of Cain,
From the cleft that yawns in your bosom cold,
Where the driven shaft so long hath lain,
And blood is mingled with the mould
That fouls your wandering locks of gold.

On my sword an oath I swore,
In the grinning teeth of Church and State,
That my love should have her own once more—
'Twas then I kept the vigil late
Beside the barred and fettered gate.

Dark was the night, and drear the quest,
Ere I plucked from deep in churchyard clay
This that now lies close to your wounded breast,
To lull your soul to sleep more sound
Than comes in consecrated ground.

I have spread my cloak as shroud—
I have roofed your grave with a dome of green —
Near groans the thunder, deep and loud—
There's hail and fire in every cloud,
And the ghastly moon stares wan between !

Hist thee, cousin, asleep so sound !
I have seen this night the drabbled wraith



Of him the reddening waters drowned—
Once and twice it crossed my path
On a spectral steed, with never a sound—
Now yonder, by the storm-rent tree,
It waits, to run a course with me—
Through horse and rider the moonbeams shine—
I may not tarry, oh, cousin mine !
Dost hear me, Joan, asleep below ?
The Dead hath beckoned, and I must go !

Away, away, thy head is free,
Bold stallion of the braided mane —
A Dead maid's wooer holds thy rein—
A Dead man rides in company—
Away, away, and have thy will—
The quarry yawns behind the hill !

THE DEADLY SIN OF THE MAVERELS (1750).

"In the Shires of old dwelt many arrogant and lewd persons, who, being enriched by plunder of Church-and-Common-lands, lived in utter defiance of God and Man, for which many of them became Accurst."

Chronicles of Hamberhead.

This is the tale that John Devine,
Of the ivied grange on the Peakland fell,
Over the walnuts and the wine
Did long ago as a secret tell
To Ernest Dale, the scholar-son
Of the parish priest of Pembleton.

In Eighteen-hundred-and-twenty-five
By John Devine was the story told
That Scholar Ernest kept alive
In cypher-symbols broad and bold,
And willed upon his dying bed
To Leyland's son of Hamberhead.

Many a time I had scanned in vain
That riddled page of gramarye—
Many an hour had pondering lain—

Before the skill to find its key
In a dream of night was lent to me.

Weird and wondrous was the tale
The captured symbols did unfold,
And, like all else by Ernest Dale,
In courtly scholar-fashion told ;
I deemed this sombre sprite of yore,
Thus gowned and scarved with bookish lore,
A stately mummer at the best,
And in the jerkin quaint and free
Of the goodly old-time balladry
Its huge and loathly limbs I dressed.

And, as I spun each jingling line,
Methought I sate with John Devine,
Methought mine eye could plainly see
The shiresman nodding o'er his wine,
And toying with the napkin fine
That lay athwart his knee ;
Rippling ran the ember-glow
O'er shaven cheek and locks of snow,
As bolt upright in the corner chair
He smiling sate, an oldster rare
Of ninety-years-and-three,

While Ernest Dale, on the other side
Of the red peat-fire a fathom wide,
Raven-hued of brow and hair,
In the stately twin of the corner chair
Lounged, listening dreamily :
And he shall read this rime anew
That as I did hath skill to do !

THE YEOMAN'S TALE.

Of the strange sunset on Elmersdale.

On Christmas night this thing befell,
When I was scarce eighteen—
Never on the Blaydon Fell
Was milder Christmas seen.

Soft the clouds, and warm the showers—
Slopes were green as May—
Lovely bloomed the blue spring-flowers
On that Christmas day.

But the sun went down in wildering maze
Of grey and bloody red—
The sky to west was reek and blaze,
And black as night o'erhead.

As I looked out from the westward porch,
The last thing I did see
Was a tuft of flame, like a giant's torch,
On Blaydon Priory.

Then my head grew host to many a rime,
And many an old-world tale

Of a clan deep-famed of Love and Crime
Through ancient Elmersdale.

Maverel tall of the snow-white hair—
King Harry's squire unjust—
Who made the holy place a lair
Of wassailry and lust.

Maverels fair, and Maverels swarth,
And Maverels red of hand,
And the curse that sent the Maverels forth
To seek a foreign land.

The curse of the nameless crime of old,
That bars from hope of Heaven
With stronger fence than the curse threefold
That waits on the Doomful Seven.

And, since that race was banned of yore,
Wherever a Maverel be,
He shall have no peace upon the shore,
Or rest upon the sea.

*So every work by a Maverel wrought
Shall crumble down to a thing of nought—
So every ship by Maverels manned
Shall founder swift in sight of land—*

BALLADS OF

*So every book by a Maverel writ,
Though wonderful in lore and wit,
Shall rot on the shelf unread—
So every maiden sweet and pure
A Maverel to his breast may lure
Shall die in her bridal bed—
And nought but loves defiled with shame
Shall keep alive the Maverel name !*

The gloaming grew, the strange light seemed
A beacon fired to warn the Fell—
The empty casements lurid gleamed—
The jagged chinks were ports of Hell !
Scarlet-eyed did the ruin glare,
A mighty Scaramouch astare,
By the Fiend made sentinel—
Then, like a curtain wizard-thrown,
The darkness buried flame and stone.

OF THE STRANGE RIDE ON THE
MOORLAND.

"Neighbour," did the Curate say,
As my father carved the chine,
"Blythe has been our cheer this day—
Port of a vintage more benign
Never did its secret tell
To the lip of one that loved it well—
But say, why sits our eldest-born
A muser silent and forlorn?
What ties the tongue of Jack Devine?"

"The lad is fond," my father said,
"And little given to making free—
He suffers from a dreamy head—
In youth, 'twas much the same with me—
But, mark me well, mine eldest son
Shall be a gamester blythe anon!"

Darkling in the nook I sat,
A watcher of the trencher-play,
And listened to their homely chat—
It seemed a thing of miles away—

BALLADS OF

Like the mocking hails and fleeting din
Of the little tabor-trouncing sprite,
That struts unseen in the yellow whin
On Blaydon Hill, of a moonless night.

'Mid the laughter loud and free
That marked the priming of the bowl,
I left their worthy company,
And to the outer darkness stole ;
I groped my way to the bedded stall,
And girthed and reined the gelding tall,
Then, aimless quite, his back bestrode,
And straight across the moorland rode.

Oh, but the night was wondrous black,
And never a sound was in the air !
I turned me but a moment back,
To note the deep and fervent glare
That starlike burned on the distant pane,
And then I faced the gloom again.

'Tis said, the talisman of Might,
That Magic doth control,
Lies anchored in the depths star-bright
Of a young man's virgin soul,

And should such youth within the spell
Of ghostly marvels move and dwell,
By viewless hands he may be led
To witness musterings of the Dead—
That may be but an old-wife's tale,
But this I know, in Elmersdale
There lives no curl-pate boy of ten
More white of soul than I was then.

With never a break in the darkness drear,
With never a sign by which to steer
Save clash of hoof and bedded flint,
On and on through the murk I went,
Till on my brow a flutter chill
Gave warning I had topped the hill;
Then the bay about I wheeled,
And vainly stared to the void below,
To find if aught of wayward glow
The whereabouts of Home revealed.

Suddenly athwart the vale
Was swung a mighty sword of flame—
Every rood of Elmersdale
Between my brow and the darkness came—
Hill, and stream, and stark-boughed tree,

And the roofless walls of the Priory,
In quivering splendour shone, and then
The blackness smote me blind again.

Just as though that dazzling stroke
The floor of Heaven had cloven asunder,
Down upon the moorland broke
Billows vast of deafening thunder :
The bay crouched low, with a smothered squeal,
And shuddered deep from head to tail,
Then locked his jaws on the curbing steel,
And bore me headlong to the vale.

I loosed my hold of whip and rein,
And wound my hands in his floating mane—
Though my heart was a sinking stone,
I uttered neither prayer nor groan ;
Yet, when once more the shining blade
Across the lonely moorland swayed,
We seemed to be with the lightning blent,
So swiftly down the slope we went—
Whelming came the thunder-roar,
Louder even than before ;
Then in his course the bay stopped dead,
And sent me whirling o'er his head.

A minute prone on the turf I lay,
With fingers hooked in sedge and clay,
Until the breath came back to me,
Then won I slowly to my knee.
Again leaped bare the sword of levin,
And o'er the flaming dome of Heaven
A cloud of splinters white
In eddies wild did surge and sail :
Never was known such deadly hail
As fell that Christmas night !

I heard it sweeping o'er the turf
As inland rolls the clamorous surf
 On the Fenland shore ;
The lightning was a blinkless glare,
And the thunder's voice in the throbbing air
 A fixed and steady roar,
Yet there I knelt, dumbfounded quite,
For, half-a-furlong to the right,
Where nought had been before
But roofless ruins stark and grim,
The Priory stood, in semblance trim
 Of the goodly pile of yore !
I rose, and took no further heed
Of battered limbs or flying steed—

Calm and slow, as one in sleep
Doth thread a danger dire and deep
And pathless by the light of day,
Unto the door I held my way.

Dark was the shelter crescent-spanned
In which awhile I took my stand—
Mighty Heaven, how the hail did bound !
The wind broke loose, a fury dread,
And yelled so wildly overhead
The thunder's voice was drowned.

Dazed and deaf with flash and roar,
I put mine arm to the shadowed door—
I stepped the ghostly threshold o'er—
 The barrier closed behind—
Soundless as the vaulted tomb
Were hall and stair and curtained room—
Quenched were daunting clash and boom
 Of hail and bolt and wind.

OF THE WONDROUS SCENE IN THE RED
CHAMBER.

I moved along with cautious tread,
And softly stole to the first stair-head—
I turned again by the carven stair,
And drew aside the hangings rare—
I stepped, amazed, from the ghostly gloom,
To the firelit grace of a goodly room,
Hung round with arras red,
Where, 'neath the frippery nestled deep
Of pillows laced and eider bed,
A beauteous infant lay asleep.

Upon the table broad and fair
There was the lave of royal cheer—
There stood two goblets wondrous fine,
Their gleaming lips besmeared with wine—
There lay beside on the napered board
A silver-hilted Spanish sword
In a silver-starred-and-buckled belt,
And a noble hat of crimson felt,
Plumed and garnished gorgeously,
And gemmed at the loop with diamonds three

Here and there, on the pile-cloaked floor,
Bright vanities were strewn galore—
Slippers twain of spotless buff,
A sash of silk, and a snow-white ruff,
And o'er a padded chair was thrown
A furred and tasselled dressing-gown.

Through the doorway wide of an inner room
Strange incense did the air perfume,
And lustrous rays were smoothly shot
In blended sheen from a balanced prism,
While music spun of mechanism
Did tinkle faint from nook remote.

Steeped in wonder, free of fear,
I sate me down upon a chair,
What within those walls of dread,
Hung with arras rich and red,
Shortly I might hear and see,
Never a jot did trouble me.

Wordless all, there seemed to flow
Whispers strange my being through—
Knowing not the how, I knew
I was girdled with a charm ;

Though that fateful room might hold
Secrets grim and manifold
From the dreadful days of old,
John Devine should take no harm.

I listened then with breathless pains,
Until a sound of kisses deep,
And stirred enamourment, did creep
Among the wanton chamber-strains ;
Then, methought, on the wall above
I saw the arras gently move.

Faintly seemed to fan the wall
That picture of the greybeard tall—
His visage long and beetle-browed,
And deep with wicked furrows ploughed,
Lifelike shone in the flickering glow,
As the arras wavered to and fro.

Then from the bower of love arose
A carol quaint and fine withal,
Balanced on the subtle throes
Of a lady's voice most musical,
And tones of manly depth and weight
With her sweet notes did alternate.

BALLADS OF

Through the inner doorway came
A lady wonderful to see—
Wavelike ran her hair of flame
O'er snowy smock to dainty knee—
A robe as red as Lisbon wine
Was flung her lovely shoulders o'er—
Never had glamour'd John Devine
Seen her like on earth before.

Her naked limbs ran round and free
In the shape bestowed by Paul of old
On his immortal Queen of Three—
The dame to whom the globe of gold
Was rendered by the amorous boy
That dragged to doom the town of Troy.

She leaned upon the very chair
In which I sat—'twas plain to see
She nothing knew that I was there—
I could have touched her bosom rare—
Her glowing tresses rippled free
In ruddy wavelets over me.

After her from the chamber came
A stripling tall and lithe of frame—
Velvet-breeched from knee to waist,

Silken-hosed and ruffle-graced
And plumed at throat with cambric fine,
Of eagle eye and skin embrowned
And face that held the Roman line,
Yet to that infant slumbering sound
And pictured greybeard lank and hoar
A deep and daunting semblance bore.

With many a gesture fond and warm
The lady did her lover meet,
And wound herself within his arm,
And searched his face with kisses sweet,
Then led him to the couch hard by,
On which the sleeping babe did lie.

Tenderly on the child she gazed,
And eke upon her paramour—
Then her lustrous eyes she raised
In mockery to the greybeard hoar,
And, laughing merrily, she said,
"Thou knowest not, old Lord of Dread—
Though moor and fell thy rule approve,
Thou canst not chain the wings of Love!"

On cushioned couch herself she flung,
And lured her lover to her knee,

Then high a purpling cup he swung
And pledged her close and courteously :
What I saw they could not see—
The ghostly glimmer fleet and faint
That again o'er the pictured canvas went.

On her pink cheek she laid his brow,
And to her own his lips did hold—
Riotous her locks of gold
O'er his stately neck did flow—
Black lay his head on her breast of snow—
And kisses clamorous and keen
Did come and go their lips between.

A gust of wind, as deadly cold
As is the damp of churchyard mould,
On my burning forehead fell —
The arras shook with a ghostly sigh,
And I was ware of a stranger nigh—
How he came I could not tell—
It was as though that greybeard tall
Had leaped from off the pictured wall.

From her spell of dalliance sweet
The lady rose, her lord to greet !
Her lips gave forth no startled cry,

Nor blenched a whit her bearing high—
With dauntless front, and eyne ablaze,
She met that loathly elder's gaze.

He turned him from her, sword in hand,
To where the infant lay asleep,
But she his onset did withstand,
And with the goblet struck a blow
That clove a furrow wide and deep
Amid the wrinkles of his brow—
The blow was shrewd—he reeled amain,
But rallied sword in hand again—
Then keen and clear the rapiers rang
As to his guard her lover sprang.

With gliding step, and bated breath,
The fencers o'er the carpet wound—
From either end of the Bridge of Death
A stern and sombre visage frowned—
And but that one dark orb of spite
Was barred with blood and crowned with white,
And the other raven-ringleted,
So like they showed on the arras red,
I vow that I would scarce have known
Which was the sire, and which the son !

And, while the chamber echoed clear
The clamour shrill of the twining steel,
That lady with the golden hair
Did by the slumbering infant kneel—
Nought of dread did her face reveal—
Silent stayed she and astare,
As the tigress of the Indian brake
Beholds, in front of her shadowed lair,
Two grisly monsters rend and tear
Their lives away, for her cruel sake.

Hit! The sire a moment stood,
Stirless as a man of stone—
As on his shirt grew a rose of blood,
The steel rang sharp on his broad breast bone—
With utterance blent of curse and groan
Thrice amain at the hilt he tore,
And lifeless fell upon the floor.

Terrible it was to see
The slayer o'er his victim stand,
And rend the bloody cambric free
That ringed the parricidal hand—
Terrible it was to hear
That lady's laugh so sweet and clear,

As to her lover's side she sped,
And drew his cheek to her lips blood-red,
Then turned aside from the foul embrace,
And scornful spat on the dead man's face !
.

There came a deep and thunderous groan
From far beneath the swaying floor—
The roof to the whirling rack was blown,
And darkness swept the chamber o'er—
Hither and thither I was thrown,
The sport of spectral hands of might,
Till, mid a blaze of levin white,
I gasping fell, and knew no more.

When morning broke o'er Elmersdale,
Was found, all drenched and deadly pale,
A halting vagrant on the fell,
But nought that through that tempest grim,
And night accurst, had happened him,
Would John Devine to the searchers tell,
But shook his head, and aimless smiled,
And babbled like a foolish child.

For ever his brain did ring and reel
With chirp and clash of twining steel,

BALLADS OF

And thrilling groans of dying men,
And ever, in his moods of dread,
Through that weird chamber hung with Red
His soul was dragged again.

And ever, when a roaring gale
Was loosed at night o'er Elmersdale,
They bound him fast unto the wall—
Then would he struggle, and cry withal,
"They have levered up the great floor-stone,
And his body into the cellar flung,
And they have left it there so long
That nought remains but rust and bone!"

Thus, while the winter slipped away,
And eke through a cold and backward May,
Till the summer days grew long and fine,
In witless trance hung John Devine.

HOW THE YOUTH WAS CURED OF HIS
MAZEDNESS.

One ruddy eve in sweet mid-year,
The Curate said to his daughter dear—
—Fair as a rain-washed rose was she—
“Go get thine hood and kerchief on,
And fetch me news of witless John,
And how doth tend his malady.”

Golden glory ruled the West,
And Margaret wore at her rounded breast,
As grangeward o'er the hill she went,
A spray of rose and tulip blent—
And all who did the damsel meet
Were glamour'd of her beauty sweet.

The light lay red on the ivied pane,
As in the porch I sat alone,
Listless all as a love-sick swain
With amorous musings overflown,
Yet ever my brain would break its rest,
To rear a mirage in the West.

Marble stairs by the gleaming clouds,
And thrones of gold on their crests sublime—
Vaporous forms in bloody shrouds,
That vainly strove the steps to climb—
Fissures blue, broad-fringed with snow,
That furtive gaped by the stairways tall—
And waves of blood in the deeps below
To whelm the wanderer that should fall !
Then my tears ran warm and fast,
And why I hardly understood,
Except that every stairway vast
Was drenched from throne to base with blood :
“How cruel is Great Heaven,” said I,
“That all this blood should stain the sky !”
The winding stream that spanned the moor
Ran ruddy in the deepening glow,
And thoughts of the cruel men of yore
Did round my brain in tumult go—
“Alas !” said I, “its tides ran clear
Until that sunset strange and drear
Did tinge them deep with hues of gore,
And John Devine all darkling came
Unto yon steep and sedgy bank—
There knelt him down, and thoughtless drank—

Once, and twice, and yet again,
And now his soul hath a scarlet stain ! ”
So wildered was my witless head
With aught I spied of gold or red.

There fluttered softly to my brow
A touch as light as floating snow—
It brushed my cheek like a swallow's wing,
And tones, as soft as the breath of Spring
At breaking dawn, did featly charm
My fevered brain to blissful calm.

Till, as the gloaming westward stole,
And starry Night trod close behind,
Cool Comfort crept into my soul,
And Reason to my mind,
While back and fro in my breast did move
The radiant pioneers of Love.

'Twere bootless, sure, to tell the tale
Of wanderings blythe by moor and dale,
Of tranced spells of deep delight
'Neath sultry noon and spangled night,
Sure, nothing can be newly said
Of virgin love 'twixt boy and maid—

Enough, that glamour-vision blest
From youth's white soul had driven the rest !

Ah me, it is a blissful pain
To know that bed of sacred mould
Where Margaret long hath lonely lain
Shall soon another tenant hold ;
And here I charge thee, Scholar fair,
When that shall be, to have a care
The ringers wake to clamour gay
The chimes that blessed our wedding-day.

For I would that none but blithesome tones
Should wander o'er the listening lea,
When loving henchmen blend my bones
With hers of old so dear to me,
And that our epitaph be writ
By thee, of trim and tuneful rhyme,
With letters moulded fair and fit
In fashion of the olden time.

Sweet Scholar-friend, yon flagon tall
Hath long a tame companion stood—
Come, fill thy glass, and drink withal
To Love, and Poesy divine,

And the spell that waits in Spanish wine
For honest men of merry mood :
Come, fill amain, and foul befall
The gloomy slaves of Lust and Blood :
Drink deep, brave friend, the wine is good !

POSTSCRIPT.

To they whom Doubt and Gall incline
To flout as a myth brave John Devine,
And deem this tale a fiction spun
By the nimble brain of the Parson's Son,
These sombre lines, on parchment penned,
And found, with those in cypher done,
'Mid Ernest's gear at Pembleton,
To strengthen Doubt I now commend.

THE VISION OF THE HOUSE ACCURST.

To a lonely house of old, in a region vast and drear,
When the dwindling moon was bound in a nimbus
of the west,

To a gabled hulk of Woe, on a black and boundless
mere,

I was borne at dead of night by the Vision-King's
behest—

With the curtain of the storm to its carven door I
came,

And was led unto the room of the Deed without a
Name!

There was darkness in the hall, there were shadows
on the stair,

There was mildew in the press as I turned its
treasures o'er—

On the huge and fireless hearth lay a tangled tress
of hair—

It was blood my fingers found on the handle of the
door.

There were spectres climbing slow, through the
ghostly pane to peer—

Ah, my soul was phantom-rid, in that House beside
the Mere!

But I stared the spectres down, and I scanned the
outer night—

Though the clouds were reeling mad as they
marched across the plain,

Though the gloom was hewn and stabbed by the
lightning-sabres bright,

Ever soundless in its rage was the riot of the rain
As it lashed the labouring pool to a sea of boiling
scum,

And the wind had ne'er a voice, and the thunder-god
was dumb.

And I marvelled much to find, as I wandered in
the gloom,

That no clamorous creak arose from the crumbling
boards below,

And I could not shake a sigh from the hangings of
the room,

Nor my feet a whisper stir in the drift of years ago,
But a stillness deep as death conquered mouldering
plank and pall,

And in silence down its groove slid the Panel in the
Wall !

I had known that this must be, and I bore me for
the worst,

As the Captive of the West shed her coil of sombre
cloud,

And the torrent of her light in an evil glory burst
On that Horror huddled low, with the wedding-
robe as shroud :

There was blood upon the shroud, there was blood
upon the floor :

Oh, my soul was terror-tied, in that hideous House of
Yore !

There were secrets yet unscanned, there were
hidden hoards of dread,

In that vast and silent room of the House beside
the Mere,

But my hands were senseless clay, and my feet
were stirless lead,

And my heart was stricken dumb with the ghastly
drawing-near

Of the clutching spectre-hands, and the leering eyes
afame

Of the ministers accurst of the Deed without a Name !

They were staring through the pane, they were
gathering closer round,

They were clambering for my soul up the stair-way
dark and steep,

But the flooring fled my feet, and I fell with never
a sound

To eternities of gloom, oh, immeasurably deep !

And the bondage of the spell unendurable did seem,

Till I freed me with a yell, and, behold, it was a
dream !

MARIAN BLOODWORTH * (1750).

"It cannot be doubted but rats, crows, and the like obscene creatures, have power of plot and advice with each other."

Chronicles of Hamberhead.

The dew is bright on leaf and blade—
The whin is strung with silver cord—
The dappled thrush in yonder glade
Is lavish of his slumber's hoard—
And ah, the South has a smack divine
Of new-mown hay and eglantine !

Athwart the budding of the dawn
I saw the spectral mowers pass,
Their valeward course below hath worn
A dewless riband on the grass—
And hark, their whistling clear and shrill
Streams flute-like up the wooded hill.

Of all this bravely-smiling scene
I stand the grim and crownless queen—
I, the beldam tall and hale,

*Pronounce "Bluddorth."

Black-avised, and cloaked with red,
And mistress of a county's dread—
Marian Bloodworth of Elmersdale !

Yes, I, that witless churls avow
Am prone o' nights to mount astride
Upon a withered hazel-bough,
And o'er the moonlit dale to ride,
To blight the barley in the bud,
And streak the milk with curdling blood.

And when I choose to trail my gown
O' market-days through Pemble town,
Men and maidens stand astare
To see me posturing as I go,
And hear me muttering deep and low
To heedless earth and empty air.

The mystery of these minstrels gay,
That float in air the livelong day
Wherever black-browed Marian goes,
As little do they understand
As emmets burrowing in the sand
The pleasure that the swallow knows.

E

And, only that my stare had tamed
Their brutal hate to sullen awe,
And Wisdom had the talons maimed
Of Jamie Stuart's bloody law,
They long ago had Marian's waist
With fire-and-faggot-girdle graced.

Yet there be oldsters Pemble-bred,
That know my maidhood's history,
When swarthy cheeks went pale and red,
And hearts beat swift at thought of me,
And gallants toasted the renown
Of black-eyed Poll of Pemble Town.

And now the matrons backward shrink
To see their children round me hang—
Soul of Woman! And do they think
I never have known the bloodsweet pang?
Ne'er languished o'er the fond unrest
Of baby lips around my breast?

Ah me! Had Passion been of old
But half as pure as it was sweet,
How many heads had shook their gold
O' winter nights at Marian's feet!

Folk deem her deeper blest, mayhap,
With this black mouser in her lap.

.
Who brought the news that he was dead ?

It was not they, the fairy throng
That prance behind me and ahead
With lilt and pipe the whole day long ;
They are but sprites, by Heaven set free,
To gild the day for loveless me.

It was the folk with eyne star-bright
That trip it o'er me and around,
When in the depth of sombre night
I break to life from sleep death-sound :
When other elves lie tranced and still,
Those merry rangers have their will.

And who so proud that he shall say
It is a pastime poor and cheap
To view the pretty pranks they play
Through watches reft from soulless Sleep,
To hear their murmur close at hand,
And all their talk to understand ?

'Tis work well fit for men of mind,
Their wondrous wiles and tricks to scan,

BALLADS OF

And surely shall such students find
The Rat is close akin to Man ;
In greed and fraud, his whole life through
A rat works much as Man would do.

In Pemble, where the stream lies pent
Between the vintry's walls uncouth,
How oft at dawn hath Marian leant
To watch the rats assuage their drouth,
And laughed the megrims from her head,
To see them lave their nozzles red !

Old plum-cheeked Gilbert of "The Hind,"
Who dost the treasured malmsey find
That fits His Honour's taste profound,
The mystery of the ullaged cask,
That sets thy simple brain to task,
Full swift mad Marian could expound !

Oh, rare, to watch that drunken crew
Their noddles in the stream imbrue,
And wallow deep with feverish zest :
"How well," they squeak, in their delight,
"A morning souse doth end a night
Of bousing strong at Gilbert's best !"

Then, but to see them deftly squat,
And counsel take, and vote, and plot
The mischief of the coming time !
Not minds so just, nor graver air,
Do human rats in conclave wear,
'Neath pillared senate-domes sublime.

Faith, when I grasped the turn and trick
Of the wild lingo that they speak,
I came to like them more and more,
Yet nought of theirs did me delight
So much as that I heard last night
In furtive whispering at my door.

WHAT THE LITTLE RAT TOLD HIS BROTHER.

Said the big grey rat with the ropy tail
To the little ranger lean and brown,
"We get scant news on Elmersdale
Of comrades dear in Pemble town—
Up here, the air is keen and fine,
And hungry over the slopes we range—
Down there, at times they wallow in wine,
And toy with victual rich and strange—
Were I but sure that times were good,
Just now, in the merry town below,
I'd muster round me mate and brood,
And Pemble-ward a roving go."

Then said the ranger brown, "I would
Thou wert advised of that I know."

"Good brother mine," said the giant grey,
And his whiskers curled, and his eyes shone
green,
"I know full well thou art little and lean,
Yet never on Blaydon ran scout more bold—

These ten long hours thou hast been away,
And aught of quarry thou hast smelt or seen
Thou wilt not hide from thy mate of old :
Dost mind the time, by Pemble Mere,
I found the leveret in the snare ?
I shared that prize with thee, dear brother,
And one good turn deserves another."

"'Tis true," the little rat then did cry,
"That never ran scout more keen than I—
Couch, good brother, 'twill please thee well
To hear the tale I have to tell."

Vagrant moonbeams slant and fleet
Shimmering fell like golden sleet
On the flagstone broad and white—
On the gaunt and grisly pair
Tailor-fashion squatted there,
Each on haunches bolt upright—
Stirless was the dew-drenched air,
Save when Pemble steeple swung
Thunderously the stroke of One.

And, as the brown rat's story sped,
The grey rat's eyes shone green and red—
His snapping teeth so white and long

Shark-like showed beneath his lip,
The while his taut and sinewy thong
Did flog the turf like a carter's whip,
And every limb this thought expressed,
"An after-supper tale were best!"

"Knowest thou," said the ranger bold,
"The ivied grange on Wedmerswold?"

"Aye, aye," said the giant, "mend thy pace!

"And the tall old Squire with the weazen face,
Who in that gloomy cage of stone
This many a year hath dwelt alone?"

"Of old I know him," the grey rat said—
"The curse of Famine upon his head!
I ranged all night those walls around,
But never a crumb of comfort found—
Cellar as bare as bare could be,
And every closet under key—
There must be magic in thy snout
If thou hast nosed his larder out."

"Folk say," and the brown rat winked an eye,
"Of old he was a chamberer sly,
And spent much gear in reckless waste

To please his wild and urgent taste,
But, now that his veins are clogged with ice,
He hugs a new and deadlier vice—
Where ruled light Woman, shall rule red Gold,
Till ends Squire Ralph of Wedmerswold ! ”

“ Now, traps and bane ! ” and the giant’s tail
Went up and down like a thrasher’s flail—

“ Now, cats and ferrets ! What use to me
Is all this niddering babblery ?

I would not give a straw to know
The Squire’s sly doings of long ago :
Pray, quit this moralising vein,
And tell thy story prompt and plain,
’ Ere I so far forget myself
As bite thine ears, thou skinny elf ! ”

“ Ha, and indeed ? ” said the little rat then,
“ Well, he who is bitten must bite again—
Yet keep thy temper under guard,
And Patience shall not lack reward.

“ I knew of a cleft in the deep red mould
That banks the garden at Wedmerswold—
There Mistress Rabbit had stowed her brood—
‘ Aha ! ’ said I, “ the long-eared doe

Will take a walk when the sun is low,
And a rabbit-supper will do me good—
A prime young suckling, tender and fat—”

—“I taste his blood!” said the big grey rat.

—“As I crawled up from out the fosse,
I smelt a stoat upon the moss”—

—“Yet,” groaned the giant, and his tail up-curled,
“Men say that God designed the world!”

“I troubled not,” said the little rat,
“To ply my brain with this or that
Of rift or flaw in God’s design—
I knew there was an end of mine.

“I crept me in at the great hall-door,
And mounted swift from floor to floor—
I pricked mine ear—there was never a sound—
Then I said ‘Oho!’ and sniffed around
Till I nosed the fume of a dead wood-fire—
Higher still I went and higher—
Listening ever, I leaped and ran,
Till I heard the groans of a dying man!”

Then said the giant, “Brother, I wis
That I can see to the end of this,

And here confess, with heartfelt ruth,
That sometimes men may speak the truth."

"I crept along with quickening pace,
Till on a pillow overhead
I spied a drawn and ghastly face—
I leaped aloft to the big state-bed—
A vagrant bolt from the dying sun
Like a tapster's eye through the window shone,
And down the old man's drooping chin
In driblets red went, wandering—
It gave me drouth—that stain to view—"

—Said the big grey rat, "Thou prating thing,
Sharp to a finish this foolery bring—
I am a-thirst, and a-hungered too!"

"Upon his chest I squatted me,
And eyed his antics watchfully—
Hither and there through the napery ran
The flickering play of his fingers ten—
Once he muttered of 'Marian,'
And of her respite prayed, and then,
Like the fluttering throes of a dying bird,
His heart beneath my muzzle stirred.

"I crept me close, like the curséd stoat,
And put my teeth to his wrinkled throat---
To his skinny throttle so gaunt and bare---
He turned his head, and saw me there !--"

"Aha, aha !—and what befell ?"

"His glazing eyes glared big and round,
And his heart awoke with a mighty bound,
His jaws went wide with a hideous yell,
And then"—

—"And then ?" snapped the giant grey—

—"I squeaked with fright, and ran away !"

Then said the other, his eyes aflame,
"My tail is nerveless quite with shame
That here, beneath the broad moonshine,
It is confessed, by brother of mine,
That supperless to the hills he ran,
Afeared of the howl of a dying man !"

"'Twas but a qualm," said the little rat—

"A sudden qualm—and yet—and yet—"

"Had I been there," said the giant grey,

"I would have reasoned thy fears away—

These superstitious fits—but, come,
My stomach feels like a smitten drum,
So murmurous 'tis with croakings hollow—
Take thou the lead, and I will follow !”

.

I saw their dusky shadows pass
In sequence through the twinkling grass,
Then, dull and spent, I laid me down,
Yet did the chimes of Pemble town,
With sullen quarters loud and deep,
Beat back the wings of courted Sleep.

And thus I stayed, till Dawn's red grace
Stole tenderly athwart my face,
And lured me forth disconsolate,
To blend my tears and bitter groans
With dew and breeze above your bones—
Sweet derelict unconsecrate !

I said “'Twas fifty year to-day,
That Marian's fingers heaped above
Your tender limbs the shredded clay—
Oh, you, the waif of errant Love !”
And then I shook with laughter cold,
To think of him at Wedmerswold.

THE MUGGLETONIAN (1760).

"Here have been knaves that, under guise of Religion, did lead astray simple rustic maidens, for which villainies the said deluders were hoisted, trounced, and pilloried, yet did the foolish women still the more eagerly follow them." Chronicles of Hamberhead..

Virgin dowered with Love's sweet grace,
Who in alien tents hath tarried long,
Lift to mine thy comely face,
Nor deem that I will do thee wrong :
The kiss I lay upon thy brow
Our holy mystery doth allow.

Well I mind that yesterweek,
When I sat the fettered slave of Scorn,
Tears were on thy beauteous cheek
For pity of my lot forlorn,
And thou didst come, an angel white,
To succour me at dead of night.

'Tis not earthly love alone
That hath winged the prayer, and forged the spell,

I have stood before the Throne
Three fasting nights, my tale to tell,
And Christ hath given me a sign
To seal thee of our faith benign.

Virtues three our creed exalts,
And the foremost Faith and Hope must be—
Cloaked are Frailty's blackest faults
By gift of dovelike Charity,
But they whom Christ doth most approve
He guerdons with the badge of Love.

And, of all things sweet below,
That our Lord doth round his footstool call,
None he seeks to comfort mo
Than hearts of damsels virginal ;
Bright vases, undefiled of Sin,
For Love's fair flowers to blossom in.

Walk with me adown the dale,
Where the bloomy banks seem hills of snow—
Voicelorn sleeps the nightingale,
And June's red moon is mounting slow
O'er shadowed glades of mystery,
That thou must tread along with me.

Chiefly thou must know the dell
That the stream hath looped with silver band
Feathered of the azure bell,
While, soaring steep on either hand,
A stately hill its brow doth line
With pennons of the sombre pine.

Velvet is the sward below,
Yet, when rides the round moon overhead,
Never a spot of green will show,
So thick the scented bine doth spread
Her creepers, fringed with blossoms pale,
Athwart the carpet of the dale.

Every clump an odorous isle,
And the Night shall lose her wonted power,
For every bloom shall wake and smile
To mock her, at the midnight hour,
And thou shalt mark, with naught of dread,
That every flower shall blush blood-red.

Red shall flame the flowering bine,
And the daisy's bosom spirt red blood,
Crystal dew turn purple wine
That in the dogrose-goblet stood,

And on the chestnut-blossoms tall
The red shall drown the white withal.

For ever, where our Lord may walk,
His blood shall glow on flower and stalk,
And ever, where his angels hover,
Blue Heaven shall smile on maid and lover,
And every charm by Passion given
To handsel Life with fruits of Heaven
Shall be this night her sweet reward
That loves the Chosen of the Lord !

.

Sit thou here and hold mine hand—
There is no scene by sea or land
More like unto a glimpse of Heaven
Than this the midnight hour hath given :
Ah me, thy cheek is round and warm !
Rest thee, my love, and dread no harm
In aught that thou may'st hear and see—
Thy lover will watch over thee.

.

Wake thee, sweetheart, canst thou hear
That wondrous strain so strong and clear ?
Dost mark, the moon goes dim and wan,

And dwindles as at break of dawn?
Yet now she mends, and in her train
The drowned stars bud to life again—
There comes no light from moon or star
When Heaven's fair portal stands ajar.

Why did they ope the wicket bright,
And let that wondrous chord run free?
Why did the moon go dim and white?
Oh, my beloved, 'twas for thee!
Ah, let me languish not in vain!
Sweetheart, be kind, nor deem it sin
To rest thy lover's arms within:
Come close, my love, for I am fain!

THE WIDOW (1790).

*"Tell me not of the tyrannies of Nero and Caligula.
The worst tyrant of all is Dear Bread."*

Parson Dale of Pembleton.

"Mother mine, oh, mother mine,
What sowed your hair so thick with grey?
Why do you droop your head forlorn?
Why do you quit the nest of Sleep,
To wring your gentle hands and weep,
The weary night from dark till dawn?"

"Rest again, oh, daughter dear,
I sit alone to watch and pray—
Close to the rime-bound hills doth ride
The spectral moon, and o'er the snow
The Haunter grey doth come and go
Forever, since your father died."

"Mother dear, oh, mother dear,
Why does he round our cottage stray?
What makes your heart so wildly beat?
Why do you clasp me close and tight

Whenever at the dead of night
You hear the whisper of his feet?"

"He strides so swift, that thing of grey,
He leaves no shadow on the snow—
That silent Wolf with flaming eyne,
And fangs that oft have set their score
Upon the bar that binds the door:
Lie down and rest thee, daughter mine."

"And does he try to enter here?"—

—"Forever, daughter, night and day"—

"The bar is strong, oh, mother mine,
But if the Haunter find a way?—
—Why sets your face so stern and
cold?"—

"Lie down, sweet child, lie down and pray."

"Lives none amid the Wise and Strong
To bring the cruel wolf to bay?"

"The Wise Man's house is well secure—
The Strong Man's hath the strongest door—
And when at sunrise, on the plain,

Men count the victims he hath slain,
Nought will they either do or say."

"I hear him burrowing by my bed !
I see him at the cranny peer !
Why are your lips so deadly cold,
And what is this so hard you hold
To hurt my bosom, mother dear ?"

"Yet kiss me, love, come, closer, come !
He shall not work his will with thee :
Though God and Man be blind and dumb,
The steel shall save—the Dead go free !"

THE FAIRY HARPER (1800).

"I fail to see that the world is any happier since the Wise Men took to burying its ghosts and illumining its byeways. A world all roads and lamps and guide-posts is a poor world, after all. For my part, I would be comfortably lost and pleasantly horrified now and then. A toad in a stone, look you, cannot go astray. Yet who would care to be such a boxed-up nothing?"

Parson Dale of Pembleton.

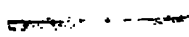
The goblin brotherhood of yore
Have bent the knee, and made surrender,
And ride their ghostly round no more,
In fetter-hung and sheeted splendour :
The Pontiff of the bookish trade
In durance deep their bones hath laid.

That bloated Father did the trick
With printers ink as holy water,
With peddled Lore as casing-brick,
With tiresome Fact as binding-mortar,
And dumped above, as added weight,
The cloddage of his own dull pate.

Yet am I proud, that when he laid
Those vagrant spooks, the clerkly carper
Quite overlooked one elfin blade—
The Pemble Valley's Fairy Harper—
So still doth walk the world o' nights
That daintiest of the woodland sprites.

Come sit beside me here, sweet lass with the eyes of
grey,
And you, my curlpate springal, that dream of her night
and day,
We must cower close down in the rushes, that the
Harper may not see,
Or back to the land of the fairies both Harper and
Harp will flee.

Now look across the lake, where the fog is white and
low—
You'd think the shallow basin was a valley piled with
snow—
I can see the trees of old Blaydon like a big black
giant's hood,
And the great red moon of the harvest seems almost
to touch the wood.



From deep within that hood will the Fairy Harper
 come,
And try if his harp be in order—give just one twang-
 ling thrum—
And when your ears have quickened, and you catch
 the fairy tune,
Right on to the end of the music you must watch the
 mounting moon.

Hark ! Did you hear that groan
 The sleepy stillness break ?
Seemed as though a thin sharp stone
 Fell clanging to the lake,
Leaving never a plash or bubble
 Behind as it sank—
We shall have music for our trouble—
 The Harper's on the bank !

That was the twang of the first sharp twitch
He gives his favourite string,
But now his fingers deftly pitch,
With many a dart and spring,
Back and forward, out and in,
Down and up, and down again,
The music leaps from his fingering clear,

Sails away to the upper air,
And mingles with the moonlight there.

Now, do but mark its merry springing—
Like nothing else it seems
But the chuckling glee and joyous singing
Of a hundred tiny streams—
A hundred little rippling rebels,
Stirring a thousand clanking pebbles—
Galloping fetterless and free
Across the breadth of Blaydon Lea.

Through it all a deeper strain
Doth subtly twine and rove—
'Tis singing now of Human Pain—
Anon 'twill break to Mirth again,
And finish up with Love.

And while the strain thus groans and cries,
The Harper's heart it laughs and sighs—
It sighs for pangs of Humankind—
It keenly laughs that men are blind,
And Pain is but a service paid
For wounds their own harsh hands have made.

But listen, listen now, to the merry wanton measures,
To the tweedle-twankum-dees and the riddle iddle-
dums,

To the jolly ins and outs, and the thousand jigging
pleasures

That he twiddles from the strings which so daintily
he thrums :

Don't you feel your insteps jerking—don't you feel
your fingers working,

Playing castanets of Spain with the apples of your
thumbs?

When the Harper harps of Love, ne'er a joint of him
is quiet,

For the matter suits him so, that his music runs to
riot—

While from Elfland every sprite to the reeling clamour
comes.

For it is the Harper's creed, that in Love should be no
sighing—

Old the volume, quaint the lines, whence he conned of
Love his lore—

Well we know no room was left puling doubt or sombre
omen

In the Love that warmed of old merry maids and
gallant yeomen,
Buxom-bright the glances then, blythe and bold the
amorous plying,
Where the greenwood wooed the sky, in the golden
days of yore !

Aye, and now he loads his tune with a strain of later
loving,
Ever low in meadowy nook, ever 'mid the billowing
corn,
Ever where the southern breeze overhead the boughs
is moving,
In the scented lane at eve, by the riverside at dawn,
For our time and ever after, Love shall still be twinned
with Laughter,
Just a radiant masquer sly was the old-sung swain
forlorn !

Pretty folk, you sit in silence now the merry strain
has ended,
Lovers twain, no longer tarry—yonder lies the path
for home—
Sure, the sooty gnomes were praying for their nightly
bout of playing,

And they sent a message, saying it was time their turn
had come :

Yet, as homeward you are linking, lovers true, be ever
thinking

On the moral of the melody the Minstrel Sprite did
play—

Through your after life be provers that, o'er true and
trusting lovers,

E'en the sourest grief that hovers may be loved and
laughed away !

AFTERLUDE.

THE POOR SCHOLAR (1880).

"In Vanity Fair are some that dance to the taborer—others that march with the fifes—even the brown man with the tom-tom has his audience. Meanwhile, away in the shadowed aisles, two or three uncover as they listen. The organist is a dying man."

THE POOR SCHOLAR.

Behold the Marsh of Mavermore :—

Yon flaggy trench with silted floor,
 By rustics named the Devil's Trough,
 Runs nor-by-east to Marden Bluff,
 Crossing the brook called Tupton Swim,
 That eastward flows through arches grim,
 O'er oozy slime and sludgy sand,
 To fenny wastes of No-man's-land.

Along its low and reedy banks
 Long lines of willow shade the stream—
 Quaint pollards ranged in gloomy ranks
 Droop o'er the marshes flat and sombre,
 Like shadowy sentinels that cumber
 The spectral landscape of a dream.

.

By Gawtry House on Maver Lea,
 The Maver Elm looms fair to see,
 Nobly-limbed and wondrous tall ;
 With seven rooks' nests its boughs are hung,

Seven thorny tents, that there have swung
From ages immemorial.

After its lord on Wedmerswold
Ten years encaged swung to and fro,
That gloomy house on the grey marshland
Stood tenantless and doubly-banned,
Till came a tar of courage bold,
With iron jaw and timber toe,
Who calmly did his hammock swing
Up yonder, in the western wing.

And there for thirty rentless year
The sailor tarried free of fear,
Till, one black night of wind and flood,
As, freighted deep with Red-heart rum,
From Marden Bluff he steered for home—
Dot-and-carry, carry-and-dot—
He sidled from his course somewhat,
And on the morrow his leg of wood
At anchor bobbed in Tupton Swim,
His head lay deep in drift and mud,
And there, alack, was an end of him !

In time, another tenant came—
The gardener chiel from Marden Hall—

A lank, dry man, with forehead tall,
And beard the colour of windbeat flame,
Donald MacKinstra was his name,
And he was dour and douce withal.

And there, through years some twenty-three,
Lived Donald and his wife, rent-free,
Though Mumkin, Marden's bandy tailor,
Did nightly bode for the sceptic Scot
A doom far worse, a hell more hot,
Than did befall the one-legged sailor.

But when the wondering Marden folk
To Donald of the matter spoke,
The Scotsman winked a cold grey eye,
And cannily thus made reply—
“I hae na auld-wife's yarn to tell,
Day and nicht, an' early an' late,
I've walked yon hoose, an' naethin' met
Mair fearsome than ma ain sweet sel'!”

Now, when the three-and-twentieth year
Had flown of Scottish occupation,
Strange tidings fluttered far and near,
And filled the gossips with elation—

Swift wagged the tongue and stubbly chin
Of every clamorous Marden codger,
O'er mug of ale and tot of gin,
For folk had marked, at the western door
Of the ghostly house at Mavermore,
A stranger, cloaked in faded blue,
And everyone in Marden knew
That "Sandy Mac" had ta'en a lodger !

And who on earth the man could be,
And why he daily brooding went
Adown the Trough, through rain and sleet,
The gaitered walking-Post to meet,
And how he earned his board and rent,
And what the mischief the man could see
In Mavermore and the House o' Gawtry,
Made matter strong of guess and doubt,
Till Donald, half in pawky play,
And half from policy, one day
To Mumkin let the secret out :
At Marden's gabled public-house
The Mountain vomited its Mouse,
And Marden to its spleen gave vent
In one ~~huge yawn~~ of discontent—

Loud rang both bar and sanded tap
With "Just a poor half-cranky chap
That makes a livin' out o' Pawtry!"

But nine days more, like a wind-stirred candle,
Was kept alive the flame of Scandal
By this dull jest that Mumkin made—
"I never see a man more puny—
If bone an' brawn be soigns o' Money,
This Pawtry is a damned poor traade!"
Then, like the Novel with a Mission,
"The Stranger" died in a first edition.

Through six dank months, in Marden Street,
It was my daily lot to meet
That ghostly Stranger wan and slim—
So slim his form in cloak of blue,
So wan his face 'mid crow-black curls,
That, next the lusty Marden churls—
Thick-calved, and sirloin-red of hue—
He looked a bulrush of the Swim,
'Mongst mangel-wurzel primly stooping,
Or the white-browed gem of Cantram Coppice,
In modest deprecation drooping
Amid a host of fire-faced poppies.

I thought me then of the jovial Seer
That dwelt afar in Peaklandshire,
And swung my legs good thirty mile
O'er pike and lane, and mead and stile ;
The moon was rising broad and red
When I came up o'er Hamberhead,
And viewed the library pane aglow
'Mid brooding sombreness below.

Of how the blithesome evening sped
In that warm nest at Hamberhead,
O'er mountain dew of parlous strength,
It boots me not to speak at length :
We talked, and drank, and talked—and so
In course of time there fell a day
When, as across the Blaydon Crown
Unto the little Peakland town
Again I drew with lengthening stride,
The apple-trees bloomed white below,
The sky was gloriously aglow,
The breeze sang thunderous in the pine,
And the frail man with brow divine,
In summer suit of threadbare grey,
That fluttered at my dexter side,

Was full of talk, and hope, and joy,
And pranksome as a ten-year boy.

That eve, we tarried on the lawn,
The Stranger mutely keen, as glad
To listen, and the jovial lord
Of Hamberhead with heart sleeve-worn,
And beaming eye, and tongue run mad :
It something seemed to scare our guest
That this bluff man so red of cheek,
So broad and full of back and chest,
Had 'neath his rugged manhood stored
Of fervour sweet a wealth untold,
So wisely, tenderly should speak
Of treasures culled from pages old,
Of posies plucked in mystic grove,
Whence the broad stream runs deep and slow
To foster aught of Wit and Love
That in the Poet's brain can grow.

'Twas hard to crack the Stranger's shell,
Yet, coming on to midnight bell,
The wine his rampart took by storm,
And snared his secret, whole and warm—
The history of the bootless strife,

Armed but with waning Hope and Life,
Of a white-pinioned Poet-soul
'Gainst that obscene and loathly Ghoul
Whose net and sword are Greed and Spite,
Whose armour is the riftless night
Of Pedantry accurst:—Ah me,
Ever and ever it thus shall be!

And then, while all the world around
In duress fell of moon-bathed Slumber,
He made the arboured nooks resound
With verses wondrous sweet and sombre—
Verses that, 'neath their strenuous roll,
And phrase Miltonic, had as chord
The cry of a despairing soul,
In its last struggle with the abhorred
And scapeless Tyranny Infernal—
The shout heroic and eternal
Of the pale Squire with shivered sword,
Borne deepward, after deadly fight
With overmastering hordes of Night.

Then, as in slow and stately march
The verses to their climax sped,
We entered, by the Doomful Arch,

A wondrous City of the Dead—
Her streets were thronged with shapes of Death—
The Dead her spectral chariots steered—
Dead captives through her gratings peered—
The Dead kept watch on ship and shore—
Death reigned above, around, beneath,
Ever, and ever, and evermore !
.

Now, on the morrow, ere the bard
Had left his snowy-curtained nest,
The Seer and I went Blaydon-ward,
And there, beneath the fleckless blue,
He broached a flask of mountain dew,
And uttered verdict on his guest.

Quoth he, "Our bird hath mighty wings,
Yet he is weak of chest and spine,
So cannot keep to fields divine,
And flutters earthward as he sings ;
Small blame, for there be few, in sooth,
Can moult the trappings of their youth—
Still chafes the chain, though the clog be gone—
Still gall the bars, though the cage be riven—
The Mind lurks lone in aisles of Gloom,
Or kneels at spectral shrines of Doom,

E'en while the Soul sweeps soaring on,
Higher and higher, to vaulted Heaven.

"What then?" And here he raised on high
The little flask, "this world is kind
To us and ours—let but our guest
Discard the spur that frets his mind,
And he shall know our kingdom's best:
Look up! In yonder cloudless sky
There hangs no City of the Dead—
The world, I say, is hale and whole—
The flask is sweet, and overhead
Trolls God's own bard invisible:
Drink deep, and send him of thy soul—
Drink, comrade, drink, all things are well!"

That morn, I caught a London train,
But, ere I went, 'twas plain to see
The Seer and Bard would disagree:
Just so it happed that very day—
The Seer sage counsel gave in vain—
The Poet listened vacantly,
Then left, to walk his own dark way.

.

A month went by ere, Shireland-fain,
I travelled back by morning train ;
At Maver Bend I left the rail,
And blithely strode for Marden Bluff,
But, halfway down the Devil's Trough,
I halted me awhile, to hail
Douce Donald of the fiery beard,
And ask him how his lodger fared.

"Gane," said MacKinstra, "a week gane,
Wi' ne'er a word o' how or why—
Eh, but yon was a purious chiel—
A frail, frail wrack o' skin an' bane,
As puir as Job, an' prood's the Deil,
An' cranky as a maid forbye."

"Not even a line?" said I, "to tell
The—the dear friends he left behind—"

—Said Donald, "It may be the wind
Had blawn beside the big draw-well,
Where the wife found it, this wee page
O' rhyme, writ in the deil's ain rage,
The nicht before he went fra' here :
I scarce kenned whether to cry or laugh
When I cast eyes on't, for 'tis clear

He means it for his epitaph—
’Tis just a rant o’ crazy vairses,
And, underneath, the gentry named—
A set o’ votaries o’ the till
That he conceives ha’ used him ill—
To a’ Eternity are damned
Wi’ twice ten thousand thousand curses !”

Next day I rode to Hamberhead :—
—The Prophet wagged his poll, and said,
“This thing goes much as I foreboded—
Bad news by morning mail from town,
And all the visions of renown,
That erst his fevered brain o’erloaded,
Like boy-blown blobs in nought exploded :
All’s over : Ring the curtain down !”

“Alack !” said I, “can naught be done ?
Come, let us seek him—he has flown
To where his early hopes lie slain—”

—The Prophet wagged his head again :
Said he, “My purse, as well you know,
Was laid before him long ago :
If you would seek him, quick, begone,

And use my credit as your own—
Yet hold no parley with his pride
If proffered help be twice denied.”
Then, noting in my brows close-drawn,
Some slight resentment, “Look,” said he,
“Out yonder, patient and forlorn,
And bowed by winters eighty-three,
Waits old John Brooke of Winterbourne,
Who ten years hath my pensioner been—
The veins show black on leathern skin
In his old arms so stark and lean—
His legs are gnarled and aspen-nerved,
And the sturdy back of old is curved
Like the sword of the Emir Saladin.
“His life is rich in sterling worth,
In dour and flawless fortitude,
In honesty, in courage rude,
In manly effort, that hath made
The barren bosom of this Earth
Bloom brave with many a fruity glade,
And many a verdant mead and lawn ;
Who, more than he, hath cause of pride,
That on his back so long hath borne
Me, and a hundred bards beside?”

Then the Prophet beckoned Daddy Brooke,
And from the corner closet took
The famous flask of mountain dew—
“Behold,” said he, whilst laughing loud,
“This goodly hero is not proud :
Come hither, brave old Spindleshanks,
And for a spell thy youth renew—
Drink, boy, and bid thy pains begone—
Nay, keep that dented castor on—
’Tis I, not thou, should tender thanks !”

Yet, as he marked me turn away
And reach my staff, a furtive ray
Relenting fluttered from his eye :
I shook his hand, and said good-bye,
Nor turned nor halted me until
From Blaydon’s green and wind-swept hill
I sought, across the rolling shire,
The whereabouts of Marden Spire.

Just then, behind me, from the dale
Uprose a loud and cheery hail—
Then, past the piny glade below,
A form came clambering sheer and slow—
Once more it hailed, a challenge free,

"Mad Whittingtonian, turn again!"
My full heart said to me, "Amen—
Told I thee not that this should be?"

"Comrade," the panting Prophet said,
"I stand some furlongs nearer Heaven
Than erst below at Hamberhead:
Peccavi! Say, am I forgiven?
Come, I will go along with thee:
What though our minstrel's nervous mind
Be somewhat borne askew with Pride?
Yon starveling of the mountain-side—
All bent and twisted by the wind—
Elsewhere a comely elm would be—
Chide then the wind; blame not the tree!"

.
"Ah, Fate, ere in grey aisles of stone
I bide thine onset, scarce delayed
By ordered tendance, and parade
Of philters vain, or battle on
As one who drowning fights with Death,
Yet drinks him deep in every breath,
Dash thy cold mace on heart and brain,
At threshold of the House of Pain!

“And, blenchless Conqueror, ere my bones—
In some unlovely burying ground,
With spike and coping fenced around,
And crowded thick with lying stones,
The breath of Rottenness abide,
Fling them unto the bleak hill-side;
There be they tumbled to and fro
By prowling fox and carrion crow!”

Our bootless quest was a year gone by,
When, in his house at Hamberhead,
Thus spoke the Prophet: I had read
Black tidings sent unknowingly—
Brief news, that to his rest had gone
The derelict and matchless One
That penned “The City of the Dead.”

.
Of this fair plant to Nought consigned,
That yet shall gain its summer pride,
And bare its purple petals wide
To wondering ken of all Mankind,
The jovial Prophet heartened me
To shape in verse memorials three.

Nor like to knaves that build them thrones
Of nine day's span from dead men's bones,
But lovingly, and in good faith,
And with the utmost of my power,
Of his deep tenderness for men,
Of his strong hopes and boundless ken,
Of his dark moods and shameful death,
An elegiac wreath to twine
In hopeful forecast of that hour
When Bards shall worship at his shrine.

IN MEMORY OF THE POOR
SCHOLAR.

1. RENUNCIATION.
2. OF HIM OVERSEA.
3. ON THE HITHER BANK.

RENUNCIATION.

Oh, rose-lipped Mistress of my heart's devotion,
 The magic Hour is nigh :
Oh, dark-locked Damsel, seaward with me sailing,
No gilded pathway spans the rocking ocean,
 And starless is the sky !

Though throbs our galley to the strenuous shudder
 That thrills the haze-hung sea,
I have no dread to pierce yon vaporous veiling,
With Hope as oar, and Phantasy as rudder,
 And thou as company !

Dost thou remember, it was summer weather,
 And hushed were wave and air,
And high above us, in a dome of glory—
When first we walked yon fading sands together—
 My star shone bright and fair !

Hast thou in mind, the wind that waved thy tresses,
 When next we trod the shore,
Blew bleak and bitter from the mountains hoary,
As fell from high to Ocean's dark recesses
 My star, to rise no more ?

Yet let my Lady hold me not offender
That, when the golden stair
Was shaken loose by seraphs sworn of Pity,
I did not mount where galleries of splendour
The serfs of Fame prepare.

For know, sweet wearer of the nameless graces,
If I had climbed, and won
My way to freedom of that gorgeous city,
The glamour of thy languorous embraces
I must have quite foregone.

And how to climb, when every skyward motion
The cords would tighter strain
That tugged the limbs of blind and bleeding brothers,
And ruthless Earth and unrepentant Ocean
Were murmurous of Pain?

Sigh not, that cold disdain of lofty luring
Hath left me here with thee—
With thee, my Chosen, and the many others,
The murmur of whose shudder-strung enduring
Still sounds by shore and sea.

That starless dome, no longer idly scan it—
Look to the depths of grey—

There glows the guerdon of our midnight cruising—
There swims in circlet bright the fallen planet,
Submerged, but quenchless aye.

Believe me, sweet, 'tis bootless work bemoaning
That vacant throne above,
Rest thou contented with thy lover's choosing—
Come, dive with him into the caves of groaning,
Where Pain is crowned of Love!

OF HIM OVERSEA.

Wearer of the sable robe, daughter of a Prince discarded,
Doleful gazer down the reach to the opening doors of
Morn,

Yours has been a vigil drear, nightly watching unre-
warded

Till your lips are blanched to snow,
And your eyes are red with weeping, and your cheek
is lank with woe,

And the silver shame is creeping in the tresses black
and long

On your beauteous shoulder lying,
From the waiting and the sighing for the ancient
priests of Song,

With your sire to exile borne.

Yet your heart has fiercer foes than the dolour and
the yearning—

There is Anger in your tears, like the lightning 'mid
the rain,

At the sour and sordid scorn, at the bitter, brutal
spurning

Of the minions high in place
Who have thrust you from the portal, who have spat
upon your face,
Who have trod your wreath immortal in the offal of
the street—

There be other pangs than Sorrow
Make you court the cheerless morrow, while the
brambles wound your feet,
Sorely-burdened serf of Pain !

I would whisper in your ear, loveless maid and sireless
daughter,
Not of hours of bitter dole, when the judges in despite
Sent the lord of loyal hearts with his train across the
water,

But of joyous days to be,
For I heard the march uproarious of a ship upon the
sea,
With the whooping high and glorious of a west wind
strong and keen,

And a strain of old-time singing,
On the breezes shoreward winging, o'er the cloven
waters green,

In a vision of the night.

Royal maiden, mark me well, deem me not a paltering
dreamer—

He shall come, and take his own, and shall hold it as
of yore,

From a ship superbly sparred, hung with many a
twinkling streamer,

Awninged aft with cloth of gold,
Rich with sheen of curious striping on her plumage
manifold,

Mad with rant of jovial piping in her galleries fair and
wide,

Gay with sailor-chant sonorous,
By her seamen sung in chorus, as she swings athwart
the tide,

He shall greet his friends ashore.

They shall bear him shoulder-high to the plumed and
bannered castle,

They shall stand with bonnets doffed at the threshold
of the throne—

You shall sit in glory there, with the Dreamer as your
vassal,

And his budget at your feet,
And his lip upon your finger, rest as tribute fair and meet,

Nor a bleak remembrance linger of the vigil weird
and grey—

There shall be no cloud of warning
In the sky that spans the dawning of that ever-radiant
day

When our King shall have his own !

ON THE HITHER BANK.

REPRINTED FROM "LITERATURE."

Shrouded Brother, lingering lonely by the grey and
silent river,

"Twixt his ghostly paddles crouching, plies the grim
old Shade no more ?

Or, by many crossings harried, rests the Boatman of
Forever

In the unresponsive Yonder, where the darkness hides
the shore ?

Wan Rejected at the Ferry, what the freight that last
went o'er ?

I have heard no hovering echo of the drums in
muffled throbbing,

Of the wailing of the pibroch, of the tramp of
following feet,

Of the rattle of the volley, of the sorrowing trumpet's
sobbing,

Of the dirge that dogs the dead man down the banner-
bordered street—

Ne'er a note of martial mourning, for a Chief of
Soldiers meet.

Back beyond the belt of brightness, where the living
fain would linger,
There was ne'er a wailful organ breathing dolour
overhead,
Ne'er a Fugleman of Sorrow, waving crowds with
strenuous finger
To a masquerade of mourning for a spell of Glory
sped—
For the Masterful and Mighty, lopped, and numbered
with the dead !
Here, before the boat went over, was no wreck of bays
that mingle
With the gold of honoured shrouding, strung and
spun with bootless care,
There is nought of ravished purple on the bleak and
ghastly shingle,
But a wreath at random woven from the trappings of
Despair—
Musing tarrier for a passage, tell me of the late-won
fare !
“Here was but the shroudless wreckage of a scorned
and sorrowing rhymer,
Of the shunned and fameless chanter of an ever-
peerless strain—

But the thousand-trampled remnant of a thrice-defeated
climber—

But the phantom of a Prophet who had prophesied in
vain

To the myrmidons of Mammon, in the market-place
of Gain.

‘But, behind the darkness yonder, there be minstrels,
many waiting—

There’s a corner in their Throne-Room for the Bard
of sombre spell—

In the Chamber of the Shadow he shall find no lack
of mating—

There’s a whisper on the water—’tis the Boatman
comes to tell

That the Countersign was spoken, and forever All is
Well !”

THE END.



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